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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

9 May 1960

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Khrushchev's Handling of May 1 Plane Incident and His  
Further Intentions

1. The USSR's response thus far to the incident of 1 May -- shown in Khrushchev's two speeches and in the direction given Soviet domestic propaganda -- indicates an intention to exploit the affair for maximum political advantage in the context of the Summit. Khrushchev has apparently rejected two other courses he might have chosen, once the decision to shoot down the plane was taken: (a) He might have minimized the whole affair, perhaps by holding back details and going as far as he could to accept the original US explanation; (b) he might have enlarged the tension-producing effect far more by charging a direct threat to Soviet security. Instead, his tone in his two speeches so far has been marked less by indignation and anger than by ridicule of the fecklessness of US spying attempts and by warnings which, in the circumstances, must be judged to be moderate.

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2. Among Khrushchev's tactical objectives at present are probably the following:

(a) He hopes to magnify Soviet moral credit at the Summit and to place US motives and intentions under a cloud of suspicion. This means demonstrating that the US -- or rather "certain circles" in the US -- are wildly endeavoring to sabotage his, Khrushchev's, open-hearted efforts to relax tensions and secure "peace." He hopes by this to compel the US to make concessions in order to retrieve its status as a "peace-loving" state (which he invites the President to do by repudiating the "militarists" who engaged in a dangerous unauthorized action.) Failing such a US response, he hopes to align world opinion with the Soviet case on the Summit issues, and in particular to sow mistrust between the US and its allies.

(b) He wishes to reinforce the claim that Soviet defenses, especially "rocket" defenses, are invulnerable. Thus it is implied that the overflight of 1 May was only the second attempt, that both it and the attempt of 9 April, when the Soviet defenses deliberately refrained from reacting, were under continuous observation.

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(c) He is trying to deter the US from any further attempts at unorthodox penetration of Soviet military secrets, and US allies from assisting such attempts.

3. The propaganda arguments the Soviets will develop for purposes of supporting the political exploitation referred to in Para 2(a) are likely to include the following:

(a) This episode proves the supreme importance of Khrushchev's proposals to reduce tensions in order to avoid dangerous accidents.

(b) A peace treaty for Germany and a regulation of the crisis -- pregnant situation in Berlin are the most important immediate steps to this end, for here warmongering is most dangerous.

(c) "General and complete disarmament" would eliminate the great risk that irresponsible "militarists" or "madmen" could send nuclear-armed aircraft on patrols over peace-loving countries like the USSR and thus touch off a war.

4. Another version of Khrushchev's intentions is possible, though the evidence thus far does not seem to support it as likely.

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This would be that he is using the plane incident to lay the groundwork for a reversal of his policy and intends to go over to a phase of sharply increased pressure and crisis. The rationale for this would be that he already anticipates a standoff at the Summit which would mean frustration of the entire campaign he has waged to set Western policy in motion toward concessions. In order to obscure this setback to his policy, and to anticipate the Chinese and other doubters ready with their "told you so's", he is willing to stimulate the atmosphere of crisis arising from a Summit failure, and probably to increase pressure on the Berlin issue. In behalf of this thesis it can be said that his Baku speech of 25 April already pointed in this direction. Also, he has the capability to go this way -- by harsh handling of the captured pilot, by going to the Security Council with a demanding line, and by stimulating an aggressive response by the Soviet population.

5. Khrushchev may be holding such a course in abeyance, depending on how the situation develops. On the whole, however, we think he will not choose to push the affair to a serious crisis. To do so would oblige him to make his move for a separate treaty

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with East Germany under more dangerous circumstances than he would like. It would carry him too far away from his relaxation of tensions policy which he must still believe has fundamental advantages for him. (See the analysis of this policy, its motives and purposes, in Staff Memorandum No. 25-60.) He would think it foolish to abandon this policy at a moment when he may think he has one of his best opportunities to divide the West, which is one of the main aims of the policy. Finally, to turn his back on it would involve repudiation of his whole course for several years past, expose him to party criticism, and probably be deeply unsettling to popular opinion in the USSR.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES.

SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman

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